DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 438 118 RC 022 246

AUTHOR	Winter, William F.
TITLE	The Rural South: From Shadows to Sunshine.
INSTITUTION	Southern Rural Development Center, Mississippi State, MS.
SPONS AGENCY	Farm Foundation, Oak Brook, IL.
PUB DATE	2000-01-00
NOTE	8p.; Based on a speech given at the Conference of the Southern Rural Development Center (Gulfport, MS, July 1999). Sponsored by the TVA Rural Studies Program at the University of Kentucky, the USDA Economic Research Service, and the 29 Southern land-grant institutions.
AVAILABLE FROM	Southern Rural Development Center, Box 9656, 410 Bost Extension Building, Mississippi State, MS 39762. Tel: 662-325-3207; Fax:662-325-8915; For full text: http://www.ext.msstate.edu/srdc/publications/millennium.htm.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Opinion Papers (120)
JOURNAL CIT	Rural South: Preparing for the Challenges of the 21st Century; n2 Jan 2000
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Disadvantaged; *Economic Development; *Educational Needs; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Human Capital; Labor Force Development; Racial Relations; *Rural Areas; *Rural Development; Technology; Urban to Rural Migration
IDENTIFIERS	Barriers to Change; Capacity Building; *United States (South)

ABSTRACT

The South can move out of the shadows of the harsh economic realities of the last 15 years and into the sunshine of developing new strategies to take advantage of the region's strengths. These strengths include a vast wealth of natural resources; a Sunbelt location; and most important, a huge reservoir of undeveloped human capital. The road to sunshine entails building stronger relationships across race, class, and institutional lines; investing in the region's human capital resources to produce an educated and well-trained work force; and recognizing the importance of technology as a key to attracting new businesses to rural communities. The first and most obvious barrier to economic success separates the poorly educated from the well-trained. In many of the South's poorest areas, poor schools not only shortchange their own kids but also send a bad signal to outside businesses that might want to locate there. The region's universities and community colleges can lead the way in creating a commitment to quality public education. Other barriers to rural development include deregulation and economic trends that favor urban areas, differences based on race, and the need to build capacity for local development. Overcoming these barriers present a challenge to everyone in the South, but centers particularly on the kind of leadership that people are willing to provide. (SV)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 438 118

THE RURAL SOUTH:

Preparing for the Challenges of the 21st

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
L. Beaulieu
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

RC 022246

Celebrating 25 Years SRDC
SOUTHERN RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER

No. 2, January 2000

THE RURAL SOUTH:

Preparing for the Challenges of the 21st CENTURY

Sponsored by the Southern Rural Development Center, the Farm Foundation, the TVA Rural Studies Program at the University of Kentucky, the USDA Economic Research Service, and the 29 Southern land-grant institutions.

The rural South: From shadows to sunshine

William F. Winter,
Watkins, Ludlam, Winter, and Stennis

Introduction

Thirteen years ago, as the nation was emerging from the recession of the early 1980s, the late George Autry and his colleagues at MDC in Chapel Hill published a distressing study of the rural South called "Shadows in the Sunbelt." That report pointed out in a dramatic way the emergence of two Souths—the South of burgeoning cities with their upscale job development and the other South out beyond the bright lights of the metropolitan areas where the old agricultural and low-wage manufacturing system was running into trouble.

The MDC report outlined the factors that were at work in stifling rural areas—the automation of factories and the movement of labor intensive industries offshore, a deteriorating infrastructure, federal deregulation, and many educational systems that were not up to speed. Autry called on the region to face up to these harsh realities and to develop new strategies to take advantage of the region's strengths—its vast wealth of natural resources, its Sunbelt location, and most vital of all, its huge reservoir of underdeveloped human capital.

That was 13 years ago, and many things have changed for the better, thanks to the vision of people like the late George Autry. The shadows that he described are gradually fading under the efforts of so many, but most would agree that we still have a long way to go. So, how do we find our way to the sunshine?

Building Stronger Relationships

One of the key mechanisms for reaching the sunshine is coming together across lines of race and section and class, across institutional lines, across lines

© 2000 The Southern Rural Development Center. This material may be copied for educational use provided that credit is given to the original source and that a brief note explaining the use is sent to the Southern Rural Development Center, Box 9656, Mississippi State, MS 39762, or bonniet@srdc.msstate.edu

No. 2, January 2000

RC 022246

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

that have separated the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, to find ways to strengthen our local communities, to increase the capacity and productivity of more of our people, and to recognize that the quality of education, especially in so many poor rural communities, has to be improved. We now understand that we are all in it together and that we can no longer let people get left out of the economic mainstream simply because of where they live. As begin a new century, it is up to us to move aggressively and wisely to chart a course for the emergence of the rural South as America's new promised land.

There are, of course, the doomsayers who say that strategies to revive the rural areas of the South will confront the same conditions that have devastated the rural Great Plains area of Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. They will tell you that there will be no place in the economy for more than a handful of rural people. They will say the best thing we can do is to educate and train them for jobs in Jackson, Memphis, Atlanta, or Birmingham.

One economist insists that the market forces are already doing that in increasing numbers—sucking people away from their homes. He holds that these market forces—unlike pellagra and the boll weevil—are forces we can't defeat. The most reasonable and humane thing, he says, is simply to point them to the cities.

But, I would insist that there is something basically wrong with that approach. In the first place, the rural South—unlike the treeless plains and bare landscape of Western Kansas—is a region of fantastic diversity and natural riches. But more than that, it has this significant reserve of still undeveloped human capital.

"One of the key mechanisms for reaching the sunshine is coming together across lines of race and section and class, across institutional lines, across lines that have separated the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, to find ways to strengthen our local communities, to increase the capacity and productivity of more of our people, and to recognize that the quality of education especially in so many poor rural communities has to be improved."

Investing in the Region's Human Resources

For years, our development strategies lay, for the most part, in the exploitation of our incredible natural resources—timber, minerals, water, and the rich earth. Those strategies served a small percentage of the population very well—those who, by good fortune, owned the land, the timber, and the minerals. The result, however, was to create a society where the gap between the very rich and the very poor was greater than anywhere else in the country. It produced a social and economic structure not unlike that of the colonial areas of Africa and Latin America.

Because we did not invest in human capital, we relegated to second-rate lives generations of young Southerners—black and white—and thereby limited our region in the attainment of its full capacity for economic and political leadership.

The fact is, we did not prepare our people for the massive transition from a low-skill agricultural economy to a low-skill industrial economy to today's economy that is dependent on educated and trained workers, whether we label it post-industrial, information-based, or technology-driven.

We have demonstrated in many individual instances that we know how to overcome our age-old legacy of underinvestment in people. Now we have to get really serious about it.

This is what we have to do. We must develop a comprehensive and systematic plan that will enable the rural areas of the South to become

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

truly competitive. That obviously will involve a strategy that will recognize and take advantage of our strengths. We know we can do it, because we have done it.

Just ask George Walker of Clarksdale, Miss., the chair of the Mississippi State Board of Community Colleges. In the poorest area of the state, he developed a manufacturing enterprise that competes successfully with the world's best and brightest. Using people that went to the public schools in the Delta and trained for their jobs at Delta Wire with the help of Mississippi State University and Coahoma Community College, he showed how creative workforce training can produce $12-an-hour workers who are as good as they come.

That is just one example. There are many others but not enough.

We diminish ourselves as a region when we fail to recognize the inherent work ethic and capacity of our workforce. The hardest working people I have ever known have been those rural farm workers whose incredible energy and endurance sustained the economy of this state in the fields and forests before the advent of machines and technology. Their descendants possess that same will to work if we will give them the training they need to compete. They have demonstrated that capacity when we have afforded them the chance to show what they can do.

Recognizing the Importance of Technology

It should attract our notice that because of the advent of computers and the other increasingly sophisticated developments in the field of communications, rural areas are in a special position to benefit. Now, with the incredible capacity of the Internet to transmit and receive information in even the most remote areas, it is no longer necessary for businesses or individuals to be located in metropolitan areas. More and more entrepreneurs are finding that the small cities and towns of the rural South offer the best of all worlds—where businesses can be carried on successfully without the traffic jams, air

The Issues

How does the South move from the shadows of the harsh realities of the last 15 years and into the sunshine of developing new strategies to take advantage of the region's strength's—its vast wealth of natural resources, its Sunbelt location, and most vital of all, its huge reservoir of underdeveloped human capital.

The Road to Sunshine

- **Building stronger relationships across race, class, and institutional lines.**
- **Investing in the region's human capital resources to produce an educated and well-trained workforce.**
- **Recognizing the importance of technology as a key to attracting new business to rural communities.**

Barriers to Overcome

Undereducation —The only road out of poverty and economic dependency runs by the schoolhouse.

Deregulation —Changing political climates and economic trends give advantages to urban centers over rural areas.

Difference based on race —Rural communities that are faring well and growing and competing for new jobs are the ones that are working successfully at creating good race relations.

Building capacity for local development —The rural South must find new and creative ways to get businesses to look at opportunities in places where they have been reluctant to go.

Conclusion

Residents of the rural South have a sense of optimism that was lacking in the past. They are ready to work together in thoughtful, creative, and constructive ways to give people more education skills, economic opportunities, and the will and vision to prosper wherever they choose to live.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

pollution, and crime of the big cities. Technology can hold the key to the success of many rural communities if the other essentials for good living are available. This means attention to the amenities such as parks, medical facilities, and, of course, good schools.

Achieving Economic Success: Overcoming the Barriers

The first and most obvious barrier separates the poorly educated from the well-trained. We must understand that the only road out of poverty and economic dependency runs by the schoolhouse. In too many of our poorest areas, we still have not created the adequate public schools that are essential to turning out competitive workers. Communities that have poor schools not only shortchange their own kids but also send a bad signal to outside businesses who might want to locate there. New businesses, new capital, and new people will not go to communities which are not committed to quality public education. The region's universities and community colleges can play a major role in creating an understanding of this fact, and they must work together in helping our region develop the full potential of all of our people.

"We must understand that the only road out of poverty and economic dependency runs by the schoolhouse. In too many of our poorest areas, we still have not created the adequate public schools that are essential to turning out competitive workers."

There are other visible and identifiable barriers that must be considered and must be overcome. Deregulation in all of its many faceted forms has created new problems for the rural areas. In the vitally important transportation field, deregulation has meant that buses and trains no longer stop at small towns. Air fares and trucking rates are disproportionately high for the rural South. The deregulation of banking means that decisions involving capital have moved from many locally-owned banks to large cities far removed from the areas of need. We do not yet know what impact the deregulation of utility services will have on rural areas.

All of this is another way of pointing out that recent political decisions and economic trends have tended to give further advantage to the urban centers at the expense of the rural South. This metropolitan growth phenomenon is itself a barrier to rural development. But excessive urban growth can also lead to a decline in the quality of life for people who live there. Many people would like to remain in rural America for that reason. Yogi Berra may have been onto something when he said, "Nobody goes to the cities anymore. There are too many people there."

As a matter of fact, this migration is already happening. As Mark Nord and John Cromartie point out in their study of rural-urban migration (published in *Southern Perspectives* at the Southern Rural Development Center), the rural South, contrary to popular opinion, is now becoming home to more and more people. The out-migration patterns of the past are being drastically reversed in the 1990s.

Nord and Cromartie estimate that in the two-year period ending in March 1997, average net domestic migration to the rural South was more than 300,000 people per year, and that does not include the thousands of international immigrants to this area. Significantly, this movement was highest for persons in the early career stages (ages 26-30) and for children. And, in the 1990s, for the first time, more college-educated people migrated into than out of the rural South. These numbers

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

foretell new opportunities for a region that some of the pessimists were ready to write off a few years ago.

But, with the changing population there comes to mind another barrier that is not unique to the rural South but one which continues to afflict us, and that is the barrier of differences based on race. All of us—black and white—will agree that we have made incredible strides in the last 30 years to eliminate most of the old blatant and odious features of discrimination. This is an immeasurably better South than it was before. In fact, I believe the South is in many ways ahead of some other areas of the country in race relations now.

But,,despite how far we have come, we still have a lot left to do to create the kind of good biracial and now increasingly multiracial society that is essential for our future well-being. This is going to take considerable work.

The communities that are faring well and growing and competing for new jobs are the ones that are working successfully at creating good race relations. The removal of the barrier of racial conflict is one that must rank high on our scale of priorities in charting a course for the South.

Capitalism has never been more popular than it is today—both within America and around the world. However, capitalism's successes have not included the elimination of poverty. And poverty-ridden areas, so many of which are included in the rural South, are the most difficult to develop in the traditional sense.

As a result, too many folks have given up on waiting for a rising tide to lift all boats,.given up hoping that trickle-down economics will trickle down to all of the people. But, we have to remember that programs aimed at moving the poor into the economic mainstream require that there be a mainstream for them to enter. The expansion of that mainstream is what we are really talking about.

There has to be a concentration on the process of community development—the creation of the bootstraps by which rural people can pull themselves up. That means building the capacity for local development. It means finding new and creative ways to get businesses to look at opportunities in places where they have been reluctant to go. The Enterprise Corporation of the Delta is an example of the kind of innovative structure that is giving the Delta areas of Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana a real shot in the arm. It is succeeding because it is involved in building not only physical facilities, but the human relationships necessary to have a true sense of community where people work together instead of pulling in opposite directions.

"All of us—black and white—will agree that we have made incredible strides in the last 30 years to eliminate most of the old blatant and odious features of discrimination. But despite how far we have come, we still have a lot left to do to create the kind of good biracial and now increasingly multiracial society that is essential for our future well-being."

Conclusion

These daunting tasks present a challenge that involves us all. But, they particularly center on the kind of leadership that people are willing to provide. We find ourselves at a fortuitous time in our history when so many elements are beginning to work in our favor. I detect a sense of optimism in the rural South that was lacking a few years ago. It is up to us to see to it that we do not miss this special opportunity.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Working together in thoughtful, creative and constructive ways, we can accomplish for this region what federal programs and market forces have so far been unable to do, and that is to give more people the educational skills, the economic opportunity, and the will and vision to prosper wherever they choose to live. I hope for more of them, it will be in the warm and familiar surroundings of their own communities of the rural South. That, it seems to me, is a purpose worthy of our continuing effort.

William F. Winter was governor of Mississippi from 1980-84 and currently is a partner in the law firm of Watkins, Ludlum, Winter, and Stennis in Jackson, Miss. He also has served Mississippi as legislator, as State Treasurer, and as Lieutenant Governor. He currently is a member of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Race; president of the Board of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History; and is chairman of MDC, Inc. For additional information about this topic, contact him at PO Box 427, Jackson, MS 39205-0427, 601-949-4800, 601-949-4804 (fax).

The information for this issue is being used, with permission, from a speech given by William Winter at a July 1999 SRDC-sponsored conference titled "Building a Quality Workforce in the Rural South: From Issues to Action" in Gulfport, Miss.

Published by
Southern Rural
Development Center
For more information contact:
Lionel J. Beaulieu, Director
(ljb@srdc.msstate.edu) or
Denise Cosper, Editor
(dcosper@srdc.msstate.edu).

The Southern Rural Development Center does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, or veteran status.

14115.....MIXED AADC 390
TIMOTHY COLLINS
DIRECTOR
ERIC
1031 QUARRIER ST STE 607
CHARLESTON WV 25301-2326

SRDC
Southern Rural
Development Center
Box 9656
Mississippi State, MS 39762

NONPROFIT ORG
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 39
Mississippi State, MS

BEST COPY AVAILABLE